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PEEPS AT MANY LANDS

SIAM

BY

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TO

MY CHILD FRIEND,

SYBIL MARJORIE COOPER,

I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE THIS, MY FIRST

BOOK FOR CHILDREN

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A PEEP INTO SIAMESE HISTORY	1
II.	IN EASTERN VENICE	5
III.	DOWN THE RIVER	10
IV.	THE CHILDREN	15
V.	SCHOOLS	18
VI.	AMUSEMENTS	22
VII.	THE STORY OF BUDDHA	27
VIII.	THE MONKS	34
IX.	THE TEMPLES	39
X.	THE SHAVING OF THE TOP-KNOT	44
XI.	HOUSES	48
XII.	FOOD AND DRESS	55
XIII.	FISHING	56
XIV.	RICE	60
XV.	A PLOUGHING CEREMONY	65
XVI.	ELEPHANTS	69
XVII.	WHITE ELEPHANTS	75
XVIII.	TRIAL BY ORDEAL	79

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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A TYPICAL CANAL SCENE	*frontispiece*
	FACING PAGE
A CORNER OF THE GRAND PALACE ENCLOSURE, BANGKOK	4
THE RIVER MARKET, BANGKOK	9
THE GULF OF SIAM—MOONLIGHT	16
A BUFFALO CART	25
A GROUP OF BUDDHIST MONKS	32
THE TEMPLE OF WAT POH	41
MOUNT PRABHAT	48
A FISHING-BOAT NEAR THE ISLAND PAGODA, PAKNAM	57
THE ANNUAL RICE-PLOUGHING FESTIVAL	64
AN ELEPHANT HUNT AT AYUTHIA	73
A RELIGIOUS WATER PROCESSION	80

Sketch Map of Siam on p. viii.

SKETCH MAP OF SIAM.

SIAM

CHAPTER I

A PEEP INTO SIAMESE HISTORY

You have doubtless already learned in your history of England that at one time this island home of ours was peopled by wild, uncivilized tribes, who were driven away into the hills of the north and the west by invaders who came to our shores from the lands on the other side of the North Sea. At different times, Jutes, Saxons, Danes, and Angles poured their warriors upon our coasts, killed the people, burnt their homes, and stole their cattle. And one of these invading tribes, the Angles, gave its name to a part of our island, which is to this day known as England—that is, Angle-land, the land of the Angles.

Now, in the same way, the people who live in Siam at the present time are the descendants of invaders who swept into the country and drove the original inhabitants into the hills. No one is quite certain where the Siamese actually came from, but it is likely that their home was upon the mountain-slopes of Tibet. Their

ancestors were a wild and vigorous race who tattooed themselves. They descended from the mountains and settled in China, where they became a peaceable people, living upon their farms, rearing their crops and tending their herds, and perhaps thinking little of war and bloodshed any more. These people are known as the *Shans*. Then, one day, there came down upon them a great horde of invaders, who drove most of them away from their homes. Some stayed behind as slaves; other wanderers travelled to the west and settled in the country we now call Burma; and, finally, some of the exiles pushed on to the valleys and hill-sides of Northern Siam, and these are the people whose descendants we call the Siamese. The word "Siam" is really the word "Shan," the name of the earliest settlers in the land. Amongst the first of the European nations to visit this little-known country were the Portuguese; and when they came home to Europe again, and told their story of the people they had found in Further India, they both spelled and pronounced the word "Shan" as "Siam," and that is how we get the name. The Siamese never call themselves by this name. The native name for the people is "Thai," which means "free," and the country of Siam is to them always "Muang Thai"—that is, "the Land of the Free."

We shall not stay here to tell the long story of how the Siamese, in the course of many hundreds of years, have fought all the people upon their borders—those who live in Cambodia, Pegu, Annam, and Burma. This history is full of curious stories of brave and cruel men, two of whom deserve just a word or two here.

A Peep into Siamese History

About the time when Charles II. was reigning in England, a Greek named Constantine Phaulkon arrived in Siam. He had been wrecked, together with a number of Siamese officials, upon the coast of India, and they had invited him to visit their country. He accepted the invitation, and they introduced him to the King. Phaulkon was a very clever man, and he became the chief friend and adviser of the Sovereign. He built a fort and a palace, and round the town that was then the capital he erected a wall, which was strengthened at intervals by small towers. The ruins of the palace built by this Greek are still to be seen in the old city. Phaulkon grew so powerful that the Siamese princes and nobles got jealous, and when the King became sick, so that he could no longer hold the reins of power, the angry princes and their friends made up their minds to get rid of the King's foreign favourite. One dark night Phaulkon was summoned to attend a meeting of the chief men of the country. He hurried to the palace, little thinking what was in store for him. On his arrival he was seized and thrown into prison, and finally he was tortured to death.

Now, about a hundred years later, at a time when George III. was on the throne of England, and when we were fighting the American colonists because they would not pay the taxes we tried to impose upon them, another foreigner rose to great power in Siam. This foreigner was a Chinaman, named Phya Tak. The Burmese had invaded Siam, and had done a great deal of damage. So Phya Tak got together an army, composed chiefly of robbers and outlaws, and with these fierce soldiers he

drove all the Burmese away. When he had achieved this great victory, he came to Bangkok, and caused himself to be crowned King of the country; and ever since his day Bangkok has been the capital of Siam. Phya Tak did not reign very long, for after a time he became mad. He fled to a monastery and donned the robes of a priest. But this did not help him very much, for the man who had been his chief friend and general murdered the mad King and reigned in his stead. The usurper assumed the crown in 1782, and the Sovereign who now rules over the country is his great-grandson. The present King's full name and title is His Majesty Phrabat Somdetch Phra Paramindr Maha Chula Lon Kawn Phra Chula Chom Klao Chao Yu Hua. He became King when he was not quite seventeen years of age, and his health at that time was so delicate that at first it was feared he would not live. However, on the day that he was crowned it rained very heavily, and then all his subjects felt very happy indeed; for if it rains when the King is crowned, then will he certainly live for many years. And so it has happened, for he is still alive, having reigned now about twenty-nine years.

ORNER OF THE GRAND PALACE ENCLOSURE, BANGKOK.

CHAPTER II

IN EASTERN VENICE

BANGKOK, the present capital of Siam, has been called "the Venice of the East," on account of its innumerable waterways. The whole place is threaded with canals of every possible size and description. There are canals that are like great broad thoroughfares, where huge boats may be seen carrying to and fro rice, fruit, and other products of the fields and orchards; and tiny little water-lanes, where the broad fronds of the graceful coco-nut palm sweep down over the sluggish stream, where green parrots scream at you from amongst green branches, and ugly dark crocodiles lie asleep in the thick and sticky mud.

Along the sides of the "streets" there are long lines of floating houses in which the people live. Each house floats on a big raft, made of separate bundles of bamboo. Thus, when the floating foundation begins to rot, the bundles can be replaced one by one without disturbing the people on the raft. The raft is loosely moored to big wooden stakes, which are driven deep in the bed of the river, so that the houses rise and fall with the tide. In front of the house there is always a little platform or veranda, on which the people pass most of their time, and where, if they pretend to keep a shop, they display the goods which they wish to sell. It is on this platform that all the members of the

family take their bath. They dip a bucket or can into the water, draw it up, and then pour the contents over their heads.

When the occupant of one of these floating dwellings wishes to move, he sends for no furniture van or cart ; but he simply shifts his house, his furniture, and his family all at the same time. If he be fairly well-to-do, he hires a steam-launch, and the little vessel goes puffing and screaming up or down the river or the canal, as the case may be, dragging behind it the miniature Noah's ark, while on the platform the little ones of the household are to be seen, bubbling over with merriment at the novelty of their experience. If the owner of the house be too poor to hire a steam-launch, he calls to his aid a number of muscular friends and relatives, and then, with the aid of great shovel-shaped paddles, they coax the home away to its new locality.

Some of the people who live on the water do not inhabit floating houses, but boats, and in these they can travel about from time to time as fancy or business may direct. Many people spend the whole of their lives on boats. They are born on a boat, reared on a boat, get their education neglected on a boat, go a-courting on a boat, get married on a boat, and never forsake the water till life is over and they set out on that long mysterious journey, from which no boat or carriage will ever bring them back. There is not much room in a boat, but the inhabitants thereof seem perfectly contented with their lot ; in fact, the Siamese seem to be always and everywhere perfectly

happy and contented : they are one of the merriest and most cheerful people upon the face of the earth.

The water population is quite complete in itself, and does not depend upon those who dwell upon the land for any assistance whatever. There are not only floating houses, but floating restaurants, floating theatres, and even floating jails. The water population has its own market-place upon the broad bosom of the great river that sweeps through the centre of the capital. In the market the buyers and sellers are chiefly women, for the women are much cleverer and much more energetic than men. The market begins soon after midnight, and lasts till seven or eight in the morning. During the dark hours of the night the boats are massed together in such a way that scarcely an inch of water can be seen. They are laden with fish, eggs, rice, and fruit. Each boat has a little lamp at the prow, and in the soft yellow light that twinkles above the polished surface of the stream, you can catch glimpses of the black-haired, dark-skinned women busy with the vending of their merchandise, and all the time laughing and chattering with the glee of a care-free people. They are just like a party of merry children out on a big picnic. As soon as the sun rises, off home they go, leaving a broad and empty expanse of river where formerly there was a dense crowd of little boats and busy women.

It very seldom happens that anyone falls overboard ; and even if a person does fall into the water it matters but little, for there is no Siamese who cannot swim.

When the children are ever so tiny, their mothers fasten under their arms a big tin float. Then they throw the babies—for they are nothing more—into the warm waters of the canal or river, where they bob up and down like so many animated bits of brown cork upon the surface of the stream.

There are, of course, many people who, in the capital especially, live upon land, and of their houses we shall say something in a later chapter. The land part of the capital, except for the palace and the temples, is not very interesting. The new brick houses and streets are very ugly, and the old wooden houses and streets are very smelly.

Some years ago there was an old horse-tram that used to run from the palace to the place where the steamers are moored. But one day some European engineers changed all that : they put up electric wires, and ran electric trams. The natives were more than a little astonished. They could see a car running along the road, and yet there was neither horse nor man pushing or pulling. It completely passed their understanding to make out how the tramcar managed to get along. At last they came to the conclusion that it must be propelled by spirits. So they knelt down on the ground, and prayed to the spirit in the wheels of the car as they went swiftly and smoothly round. But not many of them ventured to get inside. One evening the King and Queen came out of the palace, and went for a ride in the new tram. And what the King had honoured was good enough for his subjects. To-day the cars carry thousands of people in many

THE RIVER MARKET, BANGKOK. *Page 7.*

directions, for tram-lines have been laid through all the principal streets of the capital.

There are no native vehicles in the streets. Outside the capital there are no roads, and the people travel everywhere by water. When roads were first made in Bangkok, and carriages were wanted, the Siamese got their vehicles from other countries. From Japan they got the *rickshaw*, a kind of big mailcart, with a Chinaman between the shafts. The human pony trots along very swiftly, and will carry you quite a long way for a halfpenny.

From India they got the *gharry*, a kind of four-wheeler, which is fitted all the way round with sliding windows, something like those in the door of a railway carriage, except that the frames of the windows are oftener filled with Venetian shutters than with glass. The driver of the *gharry* is either a Malay or a Siamese. He wears a red fez cap and a white linen jacket. When it rains he takes off his clothes and puts them under the seat to keep them dry. As soon as the rain leaves off and the sun comes out again, he stops the carriage, and dresses himself once more. The harness is made of rope, and, as often as not, it breaks. Then you have to wait while your coachman goes to the nearest shop or house in order to beg a bit of string wherewith to repair the damage.

CHAPTER III

DOWN THE RIVER

SIAM has only one great river that is entirely her own. It is marked on English maps as the "Menam," but its real name is the "Menam Chow Phya." The word "Menam" is made up of two words, *maa* and *nam*, and means the "mother of the waters." It is the name of every river and stream in the country, and corresponds to our word "river." The Menam is not merely the mother of the waters, but of the land also, for all the lower part of Siam is one extensive plain, which has been built up by the mud, gravel, and sand brought down from the mountains by the river.

Suppose we get on board a steamer and sail from Bangkok down to the mouth of the Menam. The distance from Bangkok to the mouth of the river, measured as the crow flies, is only twelve miles, but so much does the river twist and turn that we shall be three hours before we reach the sea. But there is much to be seen in those three hours, and the time passes away merrily enough.

Everywhere there are boats—boats of all sizes and shapes, and without number. Many of these belong to the Chinese, and bear upon the prow a very realistic representation of an eye ; for, says John Chinaman, "If boat no got eye, how can him see ?" Siamese boats are chiefly canoes, or long, narrow, heavy *rua-changs*. Both classes of boats are built of teak, a wood which is

plentiful and cheap, and which is not attacked by the so-called "white ant." The canoes are paddled in the ordinary way, but they are very upsettable. Many of these will not even sit upright in the water unless someone gets inside. Yet great fat men, whose weight sinks the boat to the very edge of the water, and tiny children, whose weight looks little more than nothing, can be seen at all hours of the day darting here and there, like so many flies, on the surface of the water.

The *rua-changs* are larger, and are used for carrying people about from one part of the river to another. They serve the same purpose as our omnibuses. The boatman, who is naked except for a cloth round the loins, stands to his work like a Venetian gondolier. He has only one oar, which works in a groove cut in the side of a short pole that is fixed on the edge of the boat. With long graceful sweeps of the heavy oar the boatman both steers and propels his craft at the same time. The passengers are squatting under paper umbrellas, which keep off a little of the heat of the sun, and blinking behind the blue spectacles that guard their eyes from the powerful and painful reflection of the sun upon the shining waters.

As the capital is left behind the houses get fewer and fewer along the banks, and the trees come right down to the edge of the river. On either side of us, as the mouth is neared, there are dreary salt marshes, which are often flooded by the sea when the tides are high. On the banks, the fern-like attap-palm, that lover of the mud, bends over in graceful curves to dip the ends of its long fronds in the dirty water. Just behind, on

firmer ground, rise the stately coco-nut and areca-nut palms. An eastern saying states : "The coco-nut will not thrive far from the sound of the human voice." Whether the coco-nut loves the sound of the Siamese voice or not it is, perhaps, not possible to say, but certain it is that the Siamese loves the coco-nut palm, on account of the many useful things that he can get from it. The young coco-nut is quite a different thing from that seen in our shops about Christmas-time. In its early stages it resembles a huge, unripe green plum. Outside there is a smooth green skin, like that on the outside of the plum. Under the skin is a layer of thick white woody fibres, that corresponds to the unripe part of the plum ; and inside all there is a kernel, corresponding to the kernel of the plum. At this stage there is very little flesh in the nut, but a large supply of cool, sweet milk, which makes a very delicious drink. If you want a coco-nut, you just climb up a tree and take one. The owner of the tree will not mind, and he would be neither surprised nor angry if you were even to go and ask him for the loan of a knife wherewith to cut down his own coco-nuts. When the fruit is ripe, the woody mass changes to a tangle of brown fibres, that are stripped off to make coco-nut matting and other articles, and the kernel ripens into the nut as we know it in the English market.

By this time we are at the mouth of the river. Here the current of the river meets the sea. That current is bearing with it tons of fine sand and soil. But the sea seems to say to the river, "Thus far, and no farther." And so here all the muddy stuff in the river

water is deposited. In this way a bar has been formed, which blocks the river mouth. At low tide there are only three feet of water over it, and even during the highest tides there is never more than fifteen feet of water on the bar. Hence very big steamers can never enter the Chow Phya, but have to load and unload their cargoes by means of smaller boats, called "lighters." About fifty years ago, when the Siamese were fighting the people of Cambodia, they filled four large junks with stones, and sank them in the river mouth to prevent the ships of their enemy from reaching the capital. The junks have long since decayed, but the stones have become welded together into such a heavy, solid mass that it would take several charges of dynamite to remove the obstruction.

The first steamer ever seen on the Menam belonged to a Scotchman, who imported it from England because the King wanted to see one of the "fire-ships" that he had heard so much about. When it arrived, the Scotchman and the King quarrelled about the price, and the boat was sent away again. But the next year the King's brother built a "steamer" without the help of any European at all, just to show how clever he was, and how they could do quite well without the Scotchman's boat. The new vessel was forty-two feet long, and she had a funnel like a steamer ; but this was all a sham, for there were no fires or boilers. Instead, there were paddle-wheels hidden inside the boat, and these were turned round by Siamese serfs, who worked them after the fashion of a treadmill. Everybody was hugely delighted, and the people were quite sure that the boat

was far superior to that which any European could possibly have made.

However, in 1855 the Siamese did really build a steamboat, though they obtained the engines from New York. When the vessel was launched they had a grand ceremony. The stern was decorated with the crown and the royal umbrellas, and the deck-house was set apart for His Majesty's use. The paddle-wheels were decorated with gold, and on the main mast flew the royal standard. The builder was appointed captain, and so pleased was the King with his new ship that he ordered three more vessels to be built, one of which carried guns and was used for hunting pirates.

The chief attraction at the mouth of the river is a magnificent pagoda, known as "the Shrine in the Middle of the Waters." It stands on a little island, is built of whitewashed stone and bricks, and is surrounded by the buildings of the temple of which it forms a part. Here every year boat-races are held, which provide a great deal of amusement, for by the rules of the game you are allowed to upset your opponent if you can. Hence the main idea is first to ram your rival's boat, and then, while the crew are struggling in the water, to scuttle off as fast as you can go.

CHAPTER IV

THE CHILDREN

SIAMESE children can only be described in the language that an English mother uses about her own small ones as they tumble over one another in the nursery or in the garden—they are just "little dears." They laugh merrily, avoid quarrelling, either in words or with blows, and are most unselfish. The boy who has a new bicycle or a new watch will lend it in turn to each of his playmates, quite content to see them enjoying what was given to him for his own personal amusement.

At first sight the children, with their straight black hair and their brown faces, strike the white man as being rather funny-looking little creatures. But after a while, when one has seen more of them, it is recognised that they possess a distinct charm and beauty of their own. Their features are quite different from those of the European, because they belong to a different race of people. The Siamese are *Mongols*, as are also the people of Japan, China, Burma, and Tibet. Their complexion varies from a lightish yellow to dark brown. Their faces are rather broad and flat; their cheek-bones stand out prominently; their noses are small; their hair is long, lank, and jet-black; and their eyes are small and set obliquely. Most Siamese children have very merry eyes—eyes that have got a perpetual twinkle in them, and more than a suggestion of mischief and roguishness.

About a month after a child is born the little hair that is upon the head is shaved off. A little later the new arrival receives a name. At first every baby, whether a boy or a girl, has the same name. This common name is "Dang," which means "red." "Yellow" would be a better name, for all the babies are rubbed from head to foot with a yellow paste, which produces a very bilious appearance. This yellow powder is supposed to keep away mosquitoes, and as the dogs and cats are often powdered as well as the babies, you may frequently see a yellow set of wee creatures—animals and babies—rolling about together in the most laughable fashion. Names are often changed, so that a boy who is "Leam" to-day may be called "Chua" to-morrow. Sometimes the name is changed because it is thought to be unlucky. If "Chua" is ill, the chances are that there are certain spirits who do not like his name, so the parents alter his name to "Mee," or something else, and then he gets well again.

Smoking is commenced at a very early age, and every little boy has his own tobacco supply and packet of cigarette-papers. As he trots to school in the morning he puffs away vigorously, occasionally passing his cigarette to a friend that he also may take a few whiffs. If the cigarette is not finished when he arrives at school, he pinches off the hot end and puts the rest behind one of his ears, as we might put a pencil or a pen. As soon as school is over, out come the matches and the cigarettes again, and the little chimney puffs off home to lunch.

When the Siamese young folks get up in the morning,

THE GULF OF SIAM—MOONLIGHT. *Page 1*

they do not go to the washstand to wash their hands and faces, for the simple reason that there are no washstands. They go outside the house to a large jar of water, and then throw the water over hands and faces with a coco-nut dipper. No towels are used, as the hot air soon dries up the water. The teeth are not brushed, for they have been stained black, and it would be a pity to wash the colour off. The hair is not combed, as it has all been shaved except for a little tuft on the top of the head, and that is tied in a knot, and not often combed.

When breakfast is over the children go off to play, the baby being carried by the big sister, not in the arms, but sitting on the hip of the bearer, as on a pony. The girls play at keeping houses. They make dishes of clay and mud, and dry them in the sun; gather herbs, and flowers, and weeds, and pretend that these are cakes and sweetmeats. For dolls they use small clay images that have been whitewashed. The dolls are put in tiny cradles and covered over with scraps of cloth. The cradles are made of network fixed on to a small oblong frame, like a picture-frame. The boys go fishing for crabs in the mud, and when the baskets are full of crabs, they pelt one another with warm, soft mud, just as we pelt one another with snow in the winter-time. When they feel sufficiently tired and dirty, they take a plunge into the water, and come up again clean, smiling, and happy.

There are many games played both by men and boys, and about some of these you will hear in a later chapter.

The Siamese children are very obedient and respectful to their parents, teachers, and those who are older than themselves. They never dream of arguing with those set in authority over them. They respect rank as well as age, but they have at the same time a certain amount of independence of character which prevents them becoming servile.

CHAPTER V

SCHOOLS

SIAMESE children, when very young, are but little troubled by either clothes or schools. They spend their time riding on buffaloes, climbing trees, smoking cigarettes, paddling canoes, eating and sleeping. But at some time in life many boys go to school. There is no compulsion. If a boy does not want to go, he can stay away. Yet most boys, both in the remote country districts and in the busy, crowded capital, have learned something. Perhaps the delights of climbing trees and smoking cigarettes pall after a time, or perhaps the boy is ambitious, and wants to get on in the world. If so, he must at least learn to read, write, and "do sums." Whatever be the reason, it does happen that practically every Siamese boy goes to school. His attendance is not regular and not punctual, but in the course of a few years he manages to learn certain things that are of use to him.

Siamese schools are situated in the cool, shady grounds of the temple. They are generally plain

sheds or outhouses. The teachers are usually the priests, but here and there a lay head master may be found. In such a case the master, like the boys, is not overburdened with clothes. A piece of cloth is draped about his legs, but the upper part of his body is generally bare. If he possesses a white linen coat, such as Europeans wear in a hot country, he takes it off when he enters the building and hangs it up, so that it shall not get dirty while he is teaching. He generally smokes the whole time, and when he is not smoking he is chewing betel-nut.

The children sit cross-legged on the ground, tailor-fashion. There are no chairs or desks, and if there were the children would sit cross-legged upon them just the same. All learn to read. Now the Siamese language is what is called a *tonic* language—that is, the meaning of any word depends on the *tone* with which it is pronounced. For instance, the word *ma* can be pronounced in three ways, and has, therefore, three meanings—namely, "come," "horse," and "dog." If, therefore, you called out to a friend, "Come here!" in the wrong tones, you might insult him by saying, "Dog, here!" and so on. You might wish to say to a farmer, "Can I walk across your *field?*" If you were to pronounce the last word in the wrong tone, it might mean, "Can I walk across your *face?*" a request that might lead to trouble, especially if the farmer were a big man. Some of the syllables have as many as five tones, and the foreigner finds it exceedingly difficult to express his meaning correctly. As the correct meaning of a word depends on the particular

accent with which it is uttered, all reading must be done aloud to be enjoyed. Each scholar in the school learns his own particular page or lesson independently of the others, and the many voices blend into one, rising and falling from time to time in a not unmusical hum, sometimes loud and full, when the master is vigilant and the scholars are energetic; often soft and feeble, when the master is dreaming on the floor or lounging in the sun, and his pupils are getting weary of their monotonous task.

Slates and pencils are used for writing, though the best pupils use lead pencils. In a village school ink is never seen.

Arithmetic up to short division is taught in some schools, but in many others no arithmetic at all is taught, for the simple reason that the teacher does not know any. As for bills of parcels and recurring decimals, and all the other horrible things that men do with figures, they are unknown and undreamt of.

Sometimes a little grammar is learned if the master knows anything of the subject, and all who expect to be thought wise must learn pages of the sacred books off by heart, and must be able to repeat them without hesitation or error. They do not understand a word of what they are saying, for the sacred books are written in a dead language that nobody speaks and few understand.

And that is all. There is no geography, history, or science. There are no workshops, laboratories, or drawing-classes.

There is no furniture of any description, no dia-

grams, blackboards, or desks. I once went into a school, where I saw each child sitting placidly on the ground with a small box in front of him, on which he placed his slate or book. It was a curious sight. There were about forty of these boxes, all procured in the native market, and bearing on their sides varied announcements as to the excellence of Pear's soap and Cadbury's cocoa.

The school opens at nine. The boys arrive between ten and eleven, and the head master puts in his appearance when he has finished his breakfast. The only part of the unwritten time-table that is punctually kept is the time for closing.

In the capital there are now a number of schools that are quite well organized and taught, and even in some of the villages things are slowly improving.

Where English masters are employed some attempt has been made to teach English games. To these the boys take very quickly. Cricket is the favourite game, and some of the boys soon become as clever as their teachers. I shall never forget the first cricket-match, played between a team of Siamese boys and a number of young Hindus who had picked up the game in India. Each side brought a crowd of spectators of its own nationality. Under one clump of trees the swarthy Hindu crowd were gathered, wearing clean turbans and long picturesque robes, with their eyes all aglow and their faces all afire with excitement. Near at hand the lighter-coloured, more sparsely clad Siamese congregated, less excitable, but more genial and pleasant to look upon. Everywhere gathered the dealers in

cigarettes, the carriers of teapots, the vendors of ginger-beer and curry. The game baffles description, but I can never think of it without remembering the police-man in the road, who got hit on the bare foot with the ball, and refused to restore it until two-and-twenty cricketers, in various dialects and with yet more varied actions, managed to persuade the wounded officer that they had never meant to hurt him.

CHAPTER VI

AMUSEMENTS

The Siamese have practically no games which, like football and hockey, involve a great deal of physical exertion. They like to take their pleasures quietly, on account of the great heat. The chief amusement is gambling in some form or other. Little boys catch crickets, and bring them to school in match-boxes. In play-time they dig a little hole in the ground, put the crickets in the hole, and make them fight, meanwhile betting their knives, cigarettes, and other small possessions on the result of the combat.

Sometimes there are cock-fights. As there are few or no watches with which to time the rounds, a time-measurer of another kind is used. This consists of a small bowl that floats in water. There is a little hole in the bottom of the bowl, through which water slowly enters. When the bowl is filled to a certain point it sinks, and then the round is over.

Perhaps the most curious of the contests that are employed as means of gambling is that between two fighting fish. The fighting fish is a species of small carp about the size of a stickleback. It has beautiful peacock-blue sides and ruby-coloured fins. These fish are kept in glass bottles, and are trained to attack their own image as seen in a looking-glass. When two of them meet each other in a big bowl of water, the way in which they manœuvre to get hold of one another is most ridiculous, and the way they bite whenever they get the chance is perfectly atrocious. All the time the fight is going on the spectators lay wagers on the result.

In March, when the winds are strong, kite-flying is indulged in by grown-up people as well as children. There is always great excitement at a kite-flying contest. Two men stand close together. One man sends his kite up, and when it is well in the air the second man sends his aloft. The kites have no tails, but they fly steadily. When the two kites are near each other, one man gives his string a peculiar jerk. This makes his kite jump over the other one, descend a little way, and then come up on the other side. In this way the strings attached to the two kites get entangled. By alternately pulling in and releasing the strings they are made to saw one another. The man whose kite-string is first cut through loses the game. On many of the kites whistles are fastened, and as the kites sweep through the air shrill piercing sounds accompany their flight.

Another popular amusement is "football," which is nothing like our game of the same name. The ball is

only about six or seven inches in diameter. It is very light, as it is made of a few pieces of twisted cane. Any number of people can play, from two upwards. The players stand in a ring facing each other. One of them sends the ball into the air, and the person nearest to it, when it descends, must send it up again. He may do this with his head, shoulder, knee, or foot, but he must not touch the ball with his hands. If the ball falls just behind the player's back, he judges the distance without turning round, catches the ball on the back of his heel, and so brings it back into the circle and towards another player. There are no goals, and, in fact, no scoring of any kind. The game ends when the players are tired. Sometimes a weary one will drop out of the game, lie down for a while for a rest, and then rejoin the circle when he feels refreshed. New-comers may join the game at any moment. About the only amusement not associated with gambling is the theatre. There is only one fixed theatre in the capital. In the days when there was neither gas nor electric light it was only open on moonlit nights, for without the light of the moon the people would have had to go home in the dark. As a rule, theatrical performances take place at private houses at times of weddings, or funerals, or on other occasions of private rejoicing or sorrow.

There are no men players except the clowns. The other parts are taken by women. The plays, if acted from beginning to end, would last for weeks; but, as everybody knows the whole of every drama, only small portions are acted at a time. The better the people know the selection that is played, the better they like

A BUFFALO CART

it. The actresses move about from one side of the stage to the other, twisting their heads, arms, and legs about in a slow and curious fashion, which is their way of dancing. They do not speak. The story is told by a chorus of people, who screech out the tale, to the accompaniment of the weirdest of bands. It sounds like a mixture of drums, brass trays, and bagpipes.

As a fixed theatre is not necessary, the plays can be acted anywhere. A space for the stage is marked out on the ground with mats. Round the mats sit the band and the chorus. The spectators sit or stand quite near the players, and sometimes an odd baby gets loose, and wanders about amongst the feet of the angels and demons, who are strutting quaintly in the mat-encircled area. When the man who beats the drums or bangs the brass trays has had enough, some little boy in the audience will come and take his place, and so allow the weary musician a little rest.

There is of course, no scenery, and the audience has to draw very largely on its imagination as the performance proceeds. Suppose that a Siamese company were going to play "Robinson Crusoe." This is the kind of thing that would happen. One actress would come on the stage with a pole fastened to her chest. From the top of a pole a little flag would fly. The rest of the troupe would stand, two by two, behind the maiden with the pole. Last of all would come another actress, bearing another pole and flag, and with a rudder tied to her back. The long string of people gathered together in this way would represent a ship and its passengers. The voyage would now begin by

the company rolling round the edges of the mats in a very slow and measured manner. Presently the storm would arise. The drummers would bang, the brass-tray beaters would hammer, and the bagpipe-blowing gentlemen would nearly burst themselves. The chorus would howl, and all the little boys and girls in the audience would join in, and outdo the professional howlers easily, as you may imagine. Everyone would fall flat down on the stage, and that would be a shipwreck. In a second or two the drowned sailors would get up and walk off the stage, and no one would think it at all funny. Poor old Robinson, left to himself, would find the goat, and the goat would be one of the actresses, who would walk about on two legs, wearing a mask that would look just as much like a monkey as a goat, and with two horns on her head. The goat would circulate about the stage, dancing exactly like a human being, and the spectators would help the actress by believing that she really was a goat, and so everybody would be satisfied. When Robinson wanted to hide himself in a wood, he would walk to the edge of the stage, and hold a branch of a tree in front of his face. This would mean that he was quite hidden. If anyone pretended to see him, they would probably hear some very rude remarks from the rest of the audience, who would not wish to have their innocent amusement spoiled by a clever young critic.

CHAPTER VII

THE STORY OF BUDDHA

The religion of the Siamese is Buddhism. It is so called after the Buddha who was its founder and first missionary. The Buddha lived so many, many years ago that we know very little about him. For centuries after his death wonderful stories were told about his power, his kindness, and his great wisdom. As the stories passed from mouth to mouth they became more and more marvellous, and at the present time there are scores of tales about him that are little better than fairy-stories. In the following account of this great and holy man the known facts of his life and some of the legends about himself and his doings are interwoven. It must be remembered that the Buddha was a man who did actually live upon the earth, and that, though the fables about him are unbelievable by us, yet these fables are useful as showing us what other people thought about their wise and saintly teacher.

About five hundred years before the birth of Christ the Buddha was born at a small village in India, only a few days' journey from Benares, the sacred city of the Hindus. His father was the Rajah of the tribe of Sakyas. The boy's family name was Gautama, and under this name we shall oftenest speak of him in this chapter. But his followers never use the name Gautama, thinking it too familiar and intimate. They always speak of him under some title, such as "the

Lion of the Tribe of Sakya," "the Happy One," "the Conqueror," "the Lord of the World," "the King of Righteousness," and so on. When he was only seven days old his mother died, and he was brought up by his aunt.

The boy was quiet and thoughtful, and seemed to take no pleasure in hunting or in practising any of those exercises which would fit him to lead his tribe in war. His friends and relatives and the great Sakya nobles were very cross at this, because they feared that, when their enemies should attack them, the young prince would be found unequal to lead them in their conflicts. So they went to his father, and complained that the boy did nothing but follow his own pleasures, and that he learned nothing useful. When Gautama heard of this, he asked the King, his father, to fix a day on which he could show his skill and strength in all the manly arts. On the appointed day thousands of people thronged to the place that had been chosen to see what the Prince could do. He surprised every one, for he could ride the fiercest horses and fling the heaviest spears. He shot arrows with a bow that 1,000 men could not bend, and the sound of whose twanging was heard 7,000 miles away. After this the people held their peace and wondered.

When he was nineteen he married his cousin, a girl singularly beautiful and good. For the next ten years after that we know nothing at all about him, but we are sure that he lived a quiet, peaceful life, treating all around him with gentleness and courtesy, and thinking little about sickness or sorrow. One day, when he was

about twenty-nine years old, he was driving to the pleasure-grounds when he saw a man broken down by age—weak, poor, and miserable—and he asked the man who was driving his chariot to explain the sight. To which the charioteer replied that all men who live to a great age become weak in mind and body, just like the poor old wreck they had seen in the street. Another day he saw a man suffering from disease, and again the charioteer explained that all men have to suffer pain. A few days later he saw a dead body, and learned for the first time—a fact that had been kept from him through all the days of his childhood and his manhood even up to that hour—that all human beings must die.

Gautama was very sad when he thought of the misery that there is in the world, and he began to wonder if it could not all be done away with. He made up his mind to go away secretly and become a hermit. He would live away from towns and crowds, and see if he could not discover a way to lessen the sorrows of his fellow-men.

Just about this time his son was born. He loved this son very dearly, but he thought that if he were to find the path to happiness, he would have to free himself from all earthly ties and relations. One night he went into the room where his wife lay sleeping. There, in the dim yellow light of the lamp, he saw the mother and the child. The mother's hand rested caressingly on the head of the little baby; flowers were strewn upon the floor and around the bed. He wanted to take the tiny mite in his arms and kiss it

ere he went away ; but he was afraid of waking either of the slumberers, so he took one last, long, loving look at them both, and then fled into the night, accompanied only by Channa, his charioteer. Under the full light of the July moon he sped away, having given up his home, his wealth, and his dear ones to become an outcast and a wanderer.

Then there appeared to him Mara, the evil one, who tempted him to give up his plans for a lonely life. Mara promised him, if he would return to wealth and worldly ease, to make him in seven days the sole ruler of the world. But Gautama was not to be persuaded, and the evil one was defeated.

The prince and the charioteer rode on for many miles until they came to the banks of a certain river. There Gautama stopped. Taking his sword, he cut off his long flowing locks and gave them to Channa, telling him to take them, his horse, and his ornaments back to the town of his birth, in order that his friends and his relatives might know exactly what had happened to him. Channa was loath to leave his master, but was obliged to obey him.

When Channa had departed, Gautama sought the caves where the hermits dwelt. There he stayed a while, fasting and doing penance, in the hope of finding out in this way the true road to happiness and righteousness. So long did he go without food, and so severely did he inflict torture on himself, that one day he fell down exhausted. Every one thought he was dead, but he recovered after a little while. It seemed to him, when he once more regained conscious-

ness, that this life of self-denial and hardship did not lead to that which he was seeking. So he left off fasting, and took his food again like an ordinary man. This disgusted the few disciples who had been living with him in retirement, and they all fled away and left him to himself. When they had gone, he strolled down to the banks of the neighbouring river. As he went along, the daughter of one of the villagers offered him some food. He took it, and sat down under the shade of a large tree. This tree is known to all Buddhists as the Bo-tree, and is as sacred to them as the cross is to Christians. While sitting under the tree, Gautama thought seriously about the past and the future. He felt very disappointed with his failure and at the loss of his late friends. The evil one came to him again, and whispered to him of love and power, of wealth and honour, and urged him to seek his home, his wife, and his child. For forty-nine days and nights Gautama sat under the Bo-tree, his mind torn with the conflict as to what was his duty. At the end of that time his doubts vanished, his mind cleared, the storm was over, and he had become the "Buddha"—that is, the "Enlightened One." He knew now that it was his duty to go and preach to people the way to happiness and peace, to show them how to avoid misery, and how to conquer even death itself. It would take too long now to tell you what it was that the Buddha preached to those who would listen to him. Some time when you are older you must read this for yourself in another book.

Gautama now returned to Benares, and addressed a

great crowd of angels, men, and animals. Each man in the multitude, no matter what his language might be, understood the words of the speaker, and even the birds of the air and the beasts of the field knew that the wise man spoke to them, too. He remained in the neighbourhood of Benares for a long time, gathering round him a number of men and women, who were determined to do as he told them. When the rainy season was over, he dismissed them, sending them away in all directions to carry his gospel to whomsoever they should meet. He himself went to his native land, his father having sent to say that he was now old, and would like to see his son again before he died. His uncles were very angry with him, and when he arrived at the town where his father lived, they offered him no food. So in the early morning he took his begging-bowl and went out to beg his daily meal. When his father heard of this he was very cross, for he thought it a disgrace that the King's son should walk like a common beggar from house to house asking alms. The King met the Buddha and reproached him, but anger soon was lost in love, and the father, taking the son's bowl, led him to the palace.

The people in the palace crowded to meet them. But Gautama's wife remained in her own room waiting for him to come to her, in a place where she could welcome him alone. Presently he asked for her, and, learning where she was, he went to see her, accompanied by a few disciples. As soon as his wife saw him, she fell weeping at his feet. Somehow she knew, almost without looking at him, that he was changed, that he

A GROUP OF BUDDHIST MONKS. *Chapter VIII.*

was wiser and holier than any man she had ever met. After a time he spoke to her of his message to men, and she listened earnestly to his words. She accepted his teaching, and asked to be allowed to become a nun. The Buddha was not at first inclined to permit this, but at last he yielded to her entreaties, and his wife became one of the first of the Buddhist nuns.

For forty-five years the Buddha worked as a missionary in the valley of the Ganges, till the time of his end came, and he passed away from earth. As he lay dying, he said to his cousin Ananda, who had been a loving and faithful disciple, "O Ananda, do not let yourself be troubled; do not weep. Have I not told you that we must part from all we hold most dear and pleasant? For a long time, Ananda, you have been very near to me by kindness in act, and word, and thoughtfulness. You have always done well." And again speaking to the same disciple, he exclaimed, "You may perhaps begin to think that the word is ended now that your teacher is gone; but you must not think so. After I am dead let the law and the rules of the Order which I have taught you be a teacher to you."

He passed away leaving behind him many who sorrowed for his death. And after all these years temples are still built in his honour; monks still follow the rules that he laid down; and men and women lay flowers upon his altars, bend before his images, and carry his teachings in their hearts.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MONKS

SIAM has been called the "Kingdom of the Yellow Robe," on account of the presence everywhere of large numbers of monks, all of whom wear the yellow robe. Every man in Siam enters a monastery at some time or other in his life, and lives as a monk for a period varying from a few months to many years, or even for the whole of his life. The usual age for entering the priestly circle is about nineteen, and the shortest stay that can be decently made is for two months. The person seeking admission goes to the temple wearing his best clothes, and attended by a crowd of friends and relatives, who take presents to the priests. The presents include rice, fish, matches, fruit, cigars, betel-nut, alarm-clocks, vases of flowers, incense sticks, and dozens of other curious things. These are all distributed about the temple floor, till the sacred building looks as though it were about to be the scene of a glorified "jumble sale."

Occasionally children enter the temple service and wear the yellow robe. It often happens that when one of a boy's parents is cremated he becomes a "boy-monk," because by this means he hopes to help his father in that other world to which he has been called. As a rule, too, each monk has a boy servant, or disciple, who cleans out his cell, and does other work of a lowly

character for him. Monks may not possess silver money, but these disciples may receive it and spend it for the benefit of their masters.

In the early morning the big bell of the monastery calls the monk to rise and go out to beg for his breakfast. He takes a big iron bowl in his hands, holds it in front of him, and then with downcast head walks slowly through the streets allotted to him. He may not wander into another man's street, but must keep to his own. As he walks along, the people come out of their houses and put food into the bowl. One puts in a handful of rice, another a spoonful of curry. Someone else adds a few bananas, or some stale fish, or some scraped coco-nut. The monk looks neither to the right hand nor to the left, and gives no thanks to the donor of the meal. By the time he gets back to the monastery it is no exaggeration to say that his bowl often contains a very varied and weird assortment of oddments. It looks rather "a mess," and there is not much to be surprised at when we learn that some of the monks, who do not keep the rules of their Order very strictly, throw all this motley assortment of fish, flesh, fowl, and stale red-herrings to the dogs, afterwards partaking of a rather more tempting breakfast that has been prepared for them in the monastery. At certain times of the year only a few monks from each monastery go in search of food. The others stay at home at the temple. If a monk has rich relations, his disciple often receives for him well-cooked and appetizing meals upon which to break his fast.

When breakfast is over, the brethren of the yellow

robe go into the temple for service, after which there is work for those who care to do it. The majority do nothing, a form of employment which suits the average Siamese a great deal better than work. As the monks are drawn from all classes of society, there are always amongst them some who can repair the buildings or help in building boats, or even, perhaps, teach in the school.

At noon another meal is eaten; after that there is neither tea nor supper, so that the monks get nothing more to eat until the next morning. They manage to stifle their natural hunger by drinking tea, chewing betel-nut, and smoking tobacco.

Towards evening the priests bathe, either in the river or in some pond in the temple grounds. As soon as it is dark they must confine themselves within the monastery walls. Every evening at about half-past six the bell rings to tell the monks that "locking-up" time has arrived. The bells, which play so important a part as clocks in the temples, are hung in a wooden framework, usually built in three stories. Strictly speaking, it is not correct to say that the bells are rung. They are not rung—they are beaten with a thick piece of wood. There are generally a number of little boys playing about in the cool, shady grounds who are only too willing at the proper time to scramble up the rickety wooden ladders and hammer away on the bells with a lump of wood.

From July to October, when the heavy rains fall, the priests meet together in the evening and chant prayers. The only light in the temple is that of dim candles or smoky lamps, and the dull rays fall on the

kneeling yellow-robed figures below, or lose themselves in the blackness of the lofty roofs above, while there rolls out into the evening air the rich, mellow notes of the voices in prayer. The frogs in the pond croak a sonorous bass, the crickets add their chirpy treble, and the fire-flies flash on shrub and palm, all adding their share to the evening service.

The cells in which the monks live are small white-washed rooms, with practically no furniture. There are a few mats, perhaps a bedstead—or, failing that, a mattress on the floor—a few flowers, and an image of the Buddha, the founder of their religion. In a little cupboard the monk keeps a teapot and a few tiny cups, and he is always glad to give a visitor as much tea as he can drink. Most likely he possesses a chessboard and a set of chessmen, for most of the Siamese are fond of this ancient game.

The prayers and chants are written with a hard, fine point of ivory or iron upon long strips of palm-leaf. The strips are held together by a string or a piece of tape passed through a series of holes. The bundle is gilded round the edges and carefully preserved in a chest. These "books" are written in a language which the common people do not understand, and, in fact, only those monks who stay long enough in the temple service to learn the language have any idea what the chants are about that they so diligently repeat.

Amongst the few possessions which a monk may lawfully hold is a big fan made of broad palm-leaves. This he is supposed to hold in front of his face as he

walks about, in order that he may keep his eyes from beholding the things of the world. But as often as not, during the heat of the day, he holds it over his head to shield him from the fierce rays of the sun. And one can scarcely blame him, for he is not allowed to wear a hat of any kind, and every bit of hair has been shaved off the top of his head.

There is a chief priest to each monastery, whose business it is to see that the temple services are properly conducted, and that the monks behave themselves in a becoming manner. If one of the brethren does anything wrong, and his superior hears about it, punishment is sure to follow. For a very serious offence the guilty one is expelled from the monastery and handed over to the police. Such a man gets the severest punishment allowed by the law. But if the offence is only a mild one, then the punishment is a light one. The sinner will perhaps be set to draw water, to sweep the temple courtyard, or to perform some other menial duty usually undertaken by the ordinary servants.

Some of the "sins" that the priest may not commit are very curious to us, and many of them are, in fact, committed regularly without any punishment following. For instance, it is a sin to sleep more than twelve inches above the ground, to listen to music, to eat too much, to sleep too long, to swing the arms when walking, to burn wood, to wink, to slobber or make a noise when eating, to ride on an elephant, or to whistle.

CHAPTER IX

THE TEMPLES

THERE are temples everywhere in Siam, some not much bigger than barns; others, great buildings with high roofs and stately surroundings. Some are quite new, gay in all their glory of gold and varied colour; others are old, dirty, and crumbling to dust. Temples are not usually repaired; they are built and then allowed to go to ruin. A temple is not a place to worship in; for, strictly speaking, there is no one to worship. Buddha does not ask for people to kneel to him. He was a man, not a god, and he became holy because he lived a sinless life. Any other man who lived a life like his would become a Buddha too. And a temple is not built to pray in, because there is no one to whom to pray. Every man must save himself by his own deeds, and Buddha does not pretend to hear and answer prayers. In the temples sacred books are read, chants are sung, and occasionally sermons are preached, but there is no worship and no prayer quite in the way we understand and practise these things.

To understand, then, why so many temples are built, you must know something more about the Buddhist religion. Buddha taught that when we die our souls pass into other bodies. If we have been very wicked in this life, we may be reborn as cats, or toads, or beetles. If we have been very good, we may re-

appear as nobles or princes, or perhaps live in another world as angels. The man who has lived the perfect life, who has neither thought, said, nor done anything wrong, goes to Nirvana, where there is everlasting peace, and where no trouble, sorrow, or sickness of any kind is ever known. When Nirvana is reached, the soul rests for ever, and is not born again, either in the heavens or on the earth.

When a person dies, all the good and all the evil he has done are added up, and a kind of balance is struck. The happiness or misery of the person in his next life depends on whether he has a good or a bad balance. There are many things that we may do in this life that go to the good side of the account. To do these things is to "make merit." Some actions only make a little merit; others make a great deal of merit. One of the best ways of getting a big figure on the right side of the account is, according to the priests, to build a temple. Hence, when a man is rich enough, he builds a house for the Buddha, where his image may be seen, his lessons learned, and his praises sung. But once the temple is built, the matter is finished, and there is no need to repair it. The Buddhist says that though the temples will crumble away, yet his children will build others, so that there will always be plenty of churches, and many opportunities of making merit in this way.

The Siamese word *wat* means all the buildings enclosed in the sacred wall, and includes the houses where the priests live, the holy buildings where the images are kept, and numerous spiral ornaments that

THE TEMPLE OF WAT POH *Chapter I.1*

cover relics. The most sacred of these buildings is the *bawt*. Near the four corners, north, south, east, and west, there are four stones, carved in the shape of the leaf of the Bo-tree, the tree under which Gautama became Buddha. When the *bawt* is erected, consecrated water is poured over these stones, and evil spirits are thus for ever prevented from entering.

In the temple grounds there are always a number of graceful tapering structures, which cover relics, or supposed relics. You will see some of these in several of the pictures in this book. They sometimes stand directly on the ground, but at other times the slender spires will be found over the doorways, or even on the tops of the buildings. There is a story which says that after Buddha's death one of his disciples gave away all the property of the Teacher to the other followers. He meant to keep nothing at all for himself, but on finding one of Buddha's teeth, he looked longingly upon it, and then took it and quietly hid it in the coil of hair which many Hindus wear upon the top of the head. One of the gods in the heavens saw the deed, flew swiftly down to earth, snatched the precious relic from its hiding-place, and buried it under a great mound, which he built in a tapering fashion to resemble the tuft of hair in which the tooth had been concealed. Others, however, say that the shape of these relic mounds is due to the fact that Buddha told his disciples, as he lay on his death-bed, to bury his bones under a mound shaped like a heap of rice.

The chief building has straight walls with rectangular openings for windows. There are no beautiful arches,

no carving, and no stained glass. The roof is made in tiers, which overlap one another, and are covered with beautiful coloured tiles — amber, gold, green, scarlet, and blue. Groups of great teak pillars are so arranged that a cool and shady walk surrounds the building. The outside, with the exception of the roof, is whitewashed, and when the midday sun beats down upon the *wat* the place glitters and shines—one big splash of white crowned with fantastic colours.

Inside there is little light, and if the roof be high the rafters are hidden in darkness. At the far end sits an enormous gilded image of Buddha, surrounded by smaller images of himself and his disciples, some with raised hands, as if about to speak ; others with fans before their faces, as if to shield them from the evils and the sorrows of the world. The number of these images is sometimes very great. In one of the temples in Ayuthia, the old capital, there are no fewer than 20,000 of them.

At the end of the ridge of the temple roof, at the corners of the gables, and in many other places, there are graceful curved horns. These represent the head of the Naga, or snake with seven heads, who curled himself round the Teacher's body and shielded him with his seven heads when he was attacked by the Evil One under the Bo-tree.

In connexion with the temple there are one or more *salas*, or rest-houses. To build a *sala* is another way of making merit, and as it costs less to put up one of these wooden rest-houses than to build a temple, there are thousands of them in the country. They are to be

found upon the banks of the rivers and canals, in lonely parts of the jungle, on waste land near the towns and villages—in fact, almost anywhere and everywhere. They consist of a platform raised a few feet above the ground, and covered by a roof which is supported on a few poles. There are no walls or partitions. Here the traveller may rest, eat, and sleep. He pays no rent, gets no comforts, and is often interfered with by the local lunatic, the casual traveller, or a crowd of merry, inquisitive children. He may not complain, for the slender platform is free to all comers.

One of the best-known temples in Bangkok is at the Golden Hill. This hill is made of bricks and mortar, and stands about two hundred feet high. Trees, shrubs, and creepers have grown over it, and it is not at first easy to believe that the hill is the work of man. On the top is a snow-white spire, and under the spire, in a gilded shrine, there is a glass model of one of Buddha's teeth. For three days every year the people come in thousands to worship this tooth. They buy a bit of gold-leaf or a few wax flowers, and then they mount to the top of the hill. There they stick the gold leaf on the iron railings round the shrine, light the candles, throw the wax flowers into a big bonfire, and bang a few drums. When they have completed all these little acts of devotion, they go to the foot of the hill again. At the bottom a grand fair is going on. There are lotteries of all kinds, tea-houses, crowds of merry young men and women, dozens of yellow-robed priests, side-shows with giant women and two-headed snakes. It is all laughter, chatter, and enjoyment.

In another temple there is an image of Buddha asleep. The idol is 175 feet long, and has a whole building to itself. The gigantic figure is made of brick and covered with gilded cement. It is 18 feet across the chest; the feet are 5 yards long; the toes, which are each of equal length, measure 1 yard.

CHAPTER X

THE SHAVING OF THE TOP-KNOT

Sometimes when the traveller is passing along one of the rivers or canals he will hear the sound of merry music close at hand. He probably pulls ashore, and goes to see what is happening. There is no need to wait for invitations in this free-and-easy country. He makes his way to the place where the band is doing its best to deafen all the poor creatures within reach, and there he finds a motley crowd—men and women in their best and brightest clothes, priests in their most brilliant yellow, actresses with chalked faces and hideous masks, dogs, cats, and children. Amongst the many people assembled together there is one child, about eleven or thirteen years old, laden with jewellery—necklaces, gold chains, armlets, bracelets, and anklets. It is on this child's account that the people are feasting together, the theatre playing, and the drums booming. We will suppose that the child is a boy. He is holding a great party. The visitors have come to see him get his hair cut! This, however, is not an ordinary visit

to a barber, but a ceremony as important as a wedding or a funeral.

From the very earliest years the heads of the children are shaved completely, with the exception of one little tuft in the centre of the head. Each day this precious tuft is oiled and curled, a jewelled pin is stuck through it, and a tiny wreath of freshly woven flowers is twined around it. No scissors are ever allowed to touch the cherished lock until the boy is eleven, thirteen, or fifteen years old, and by that time it is often a foot or more long.

When the parents think that the proper time has almost arrived for the top-knot to be removed, they visit an astrologer, who fixes a lucky day for the operation. If the hair were not cut off on a lucky day, and in just the proper fashion, no one knows what terrible things might happen to the child. He might become ill or insane, or he might die, or, worse still, demons might come and live inside him. So extremely great care has to be taken that all is done in a fitting manner. After the astrologer has appointed the day, people are invited to be present at the ceremonies. Actresses, priests, and friends are called together, and for two or three days there are prayers and plays, feasts and fiddling.

The performance is opened by the priests. They ascend to a platform some feet above the ground, and sit down cross-legged like tailors on the mats. They chant long passages from the sacred books, and ask the spirits to be kind to the boy and to keep all evil away from him. While they are chanting, they hold a piece

of white thread in their hands. One end of this thread is tied round the clasped hands of the child, and as the priests call down blessings from above, these blessings pass through the hands of the priests, along the thread, and so into the body and soul of the boy. It works like a telegraph wire, and no one sees the good influences flashing along the cotton. There is also a thread fastened right round the house and the gardens to keep out the naughty little demons that take a delight in spoiling the proceedings.

On the second day, the chief person present takes a pair of scissors and clips off the top-knot, after which a professional barber comes along with a nice sharp razor, and the boy's head is shaved completely, so that it looks very much like a new clean ostrich egg. The boy now dresses himself in white robes, and the priests lead him to a seat raised from the ground and shaded by a canopy of white cloth. First the parents, then the relations, and last of all the friends, pour holy water over the boy's head. Everybody likes to play his part, and there the youngster sits in his drenched robes, as the crowd files by and half drowns him with the water. When the last person has emptied the last bowl, the boy is dressed in the gayest clothes that he possesses, or that can be borrowed for the occasion, and is seated on a throne. On each side of him is a stand laden with rice, fruit, flowers, and other things. These are offerings to the spirits of the air. The band strikes up ; the people form a kind of procession, and walk round the child five times. Each person carries a lighted candle, which is blown out when the fifth turn

is made. The smoke is wafted towards the young person on the throne, and as it circles round his shaven crown, it bears towards him a supply of courage and good luck sufficient to last him for the rest of his life.

All this time the child is probably more bored than delighted with the honour paid to him. But the next part of the ceremony gives him every satisfaction. It would please anybody. The relatives and friends present money to the child, each giving according to his means, so that if the boy has many rich relatives he gets quite a handsome sum. The gifts vary in value from about half a crown to ten pounds.

All is not yet over, for a long and jolly feast is the necessary termination of the important event. The priests are served first. When they have finished, the rest of the party fall rapidly and heartily upon the multitude of tempting dishes that have been prepared.

People who are very poor and have no friends merely go to a certain temple and ask one of the priests to cut off the top-knot. Rich people, on the other hand, spend enormous sums of money in entertaining their friends and in giving presents. The gifts to a young princess on one of these occasions amounted to £10,000.

The hairs that have been cut off are separated into two bundles, long and short. The short hairs are put into a little vessel made of plantain-leaves, and sent adrift on the ebb-tide in the nearest canal or river. As they float away, they carry with them all the bad temper, the greediness, and the pride of their former owner. The shaven child gets a new start in life, freed

from all that was disagreeable in his character. The long hairs are kept till he makes a pilgrimage to worship at Buddha's footprint on the sacred hill at Prabat. This footprint is about as big, and exactly the same shape, as a bath. The hairs are given to the priests, who are supposed to make them into brushes for sweeping the footprint ; but in reality so much hair is presented to the priests each year that they are unable to use it all. They wait till the pilgrims have gone home again, when they throw all the hair that they do not want into a fire.

CHAPTER XI

HOUSES

The houses are built of wood, and are raised above the ground on piles, so that when the rainy season comes and the plains are flooded, the floors are left high and dry. In the dry season the cattle are stabled under the houses. A stable under your bedroom is not perhaps the pleasantest arrangement that could be imagined, but in parts of the country there are bands of robbers who spend their evenings in stealing cattle. When the robbers try to move the animals, the animals make a noise, wake the owner, and give him a chance to prevent the theft. When the country is flooded, the pony, who is generally a pet, is led up an inclined plane to the little veranda, where it lives and is treated as a member of the family.

MOUNT PRABHAT. *Pa . . .*

Houses

The chief woods used in building houses are teak and bamboo. Teak is a very hard wood. It is not affected by damp, and resists the attacks of the so-called "white ant."

The floors of the native houses are made of teak planks, or more usually of plaited bamboo. Through the holes that are left, the air comes up from below, keeping the rooms cool, but at the same time filling them with most unpleasant odours. A great deal of the ordinary domestic refuse is got rid of by the simple plan of pushing it through the holes in the floor, and leaving it to rot in the space between the house and the ground.

Fortunately for the health of the inhabitants, pariah dogs abound everywhere. They feed chiefly on this refuse, thus playing the part of scavengers. The pariahs have no owners, and no one takes any care or notice of them. They are thin and bony, frightfully ugly, fond of barking at all hours of the day or the night, but not given to biting, for they are thorough cowards. A hundred of them would run away from a small boy, provided he had a big stick in his hand.

The number of rooms in the house is always an odd one, for even numbers are considered unlucky. A small house would contain at least three rooms, which we may call the drawing-room, the bedroom, and the kitchen. The third of these rooms will be described in the next chapter.

The drawing-room contains no chairs, tables, pianos, or pictures. In fact, it contains no furniture of any kind, with perhaps the exception of a few mats on the

floor, on which the people sit. When visitors call, they are offered tea in tiny cups that hold about as much as a big table-spoon. This tea, which is taken without milk or sugar, is of a beautiful light golden colour, and has a faint but pleasant and refreshing odour. The chief thing offered to the visitor is betel-nut, the fruit of the tall, slender areca-palm. So important a part does the betel-nut play in the daily life of the native, that, if possible, a house is always built near a grove of areca-palms, in order that there may be a never-failing supply of the nut. Betel is not eaten alone, but with a mixture of turmeric, seri-leaf, lime, and tobacco. Chewing betel produces copious supplies of blood-red saliva. If this is ejected upon wood or stone, it leaves nasty rusty-red stains that cannot be removed even by the most diligent scrubbing. Hence a spittoon is a very necessary domestic article. Everybody chews ; everybody possesses spittoons. You will see them by the side of the mother rocking the cradle, by the side of the teacher in the school, by the side of the judge in the law courts, by the side of the priest as he chants his matin or evensong in the temple, by the side of the King as he sits upon his throne.

In time, the teeth become coal-black. They are then regarded as being much more beautiful than when they were white. A native saying runs: "Any dog can have white teeth." In Bangkok the American dentists keep supplies of false black teeth, and when a prince or a nobleman loses one of his own teeth, he can buy another black one and so not spoil his appearance.

The second room of the house is the bedroom, which

is also used as a lumber-room, and where, if anyone be ill, a number of gilded images of Buddha will be found. There are no bedsteads. People sleep on a kind of mat placed on the floor. This is surrounded by curtains to keep out the mosquitoes. Sleep would be quite impossible without some form of protection against the bites of these wicked little creatures.

When lying down, the head must not point to the west. The sun dies his daily death in that part of the heavens, and the west is therefore an unlucky direction. The sleeper must lie pointing north and south, and then he will be quite sure of complete freedom from evil spirits and angry demons during the dark hours of the night.

The walls and floors of the houses, as we have seen, are made of wood. The roofs are thatched with the leaf of the attap-palm. In the dry season every part of the dwelling becomes excessively dry. A stray spark will often set on fire one of these houses of grass and wood, and then, one after another, other habitations fall a prey to the flames. There is no fire brigade, and it would not be of any use if there were one, for there is no public water-supply. When a fire breaks out, soldiers are sent to the scene of the disaster, armed, not with rifles, but with hatchets. As quickly as they can, they chop down a great many houses in the neighbourhood of those that are on fire, and in this way prevent the spread of the flames.

The Siamese are a cleanly people as far as their bodies are concerned. They bathe at least two or three times a day, but their houses are never cleaned.

Cobwebs grow thicker and thicker with dust, till they look like ropes; insects of all kinds multiply without interference; mosquito-nets become so caked with dirt that it is a wonder any respectable mosquito ever wishes to go inside; floors are never scrubbed; walls are never dusted. There is no such process as spring-cleaning, except when a fire performs the deed, and sweeps away house, refuse, and vermin, all at one and the same time.

CHAPTER XII

FOOD AND DRESS

The third necessary room in a Siamese house is the kitchen, where the two daily meals are prepared. There are no cooking-ranges and no fireplaces of European pattern. Food is cooked and water boiled over small charcoal furnaces, usually made of earthenware. The little furnace has the shape of a bucket. Half-way down there is a tray perforated with holes, on which the charcoal is placed. Below the shelf, in one side of the utensil, there is a hole. A draught is obtained by waving a fan backwards and forwards in front of this hole. The air enters through the aperture, ascends through the openings in the shelf, and so keeps the lighted charcoal glowing. The earthenware pots in which the food is cooked are supported by the top rim of the furnace. Every pot requires a separate furnace to itself, but as rice is often the only food that requires the application of heat, this causes but little difficulty,

and few kitchens would contain more than two or three of these simple fireplaces.

The chief food is rice. This is washed three or four times in different changes of water, and then placed in cold water over the charcoal fire. As soon as the water boils, it is poured away, and the cooking is finished in the steam of the water left behind. When everything is ready, the rice is turned out into a dish; each grain is swollen to quite a large size, is dry, and as white as snow.

With the rice various kinds of curry are eaten. They are made from vegetables, fruit, and fish. Frog, decayed prawns, stale fish, and other choice morsels figure in the menu. All the curries are highly flavoured with vinegar, pepper, and strong-tasting spices. The Siamese are so accustomed to these highly flavoured dishes that they would look upon a meal of turkey and plum-pudding as utterly tasteless and insipid. One of the sauces in common use contains chillies, stale prawns, black pepper, garlic, onions, citron-juice, ginger, and brine!

When the members of the family sit down to take a meal, they squat on the floor. A big bowl of rice is placed in the centre of the ring, and round it are arranged smaller basins of curry. Everybody helps himself, so that the fastest eater gets the biggest share. Forks and knives are not used, and very often spoons also are lacking. In such cases fingers take the place of spoons, and they seem to serve the purpose equally well. Of course, the fingers get greasy and sticky, but they can be put in the mouth and licked clean again quite easily and quickly.

Each member of the family knows how to cook—father, mother, and children—for there are few dishes to prepare, and the preparation of these is an art soon acquired. Two meals only are taken each day—one in the morning and another in the early evening. Between whiles tea is drunk, tobacco is smoked, and betel-nut is chewed. The hours for meals are rather irregular, and often the hungry members do not wait for those whose appetites are less keen, but begin as soon as ever the rice is boiled. Amongst the rich the men eat first and by themselves. What they leave serves for their wives and children, and the last remnants of all are thrown to the dogs.

As dessert there are many kinds of fruit, some of which are unknown in this country. Amongst the most popular fruits are young coco-nuts; the ripest of bananas; mangoes, that taste at first like a mixture of turpentine and carrots, but which, after a few efforts, are found to be as pleasant to the palate as the apple or the pear; mangosteens—little sweet snow-white balls set in crimson caskets; durians, that smell like bad drains, but taste, when one is used to them, like a mixture of strawberries, ices, honey, and all other things that are pleasant to eat.

When the meal is over, each person washes his own rice-bowl, and turns it upside down in a basket in the corner of the room to drip and dry till it is needed again.

Dress is a very simple matter. There are no such things as fashions. The smallest children wear no clothing at all, except, perhaps, a necklace of coral or

beads. The garment worn as a covering for the lower part of the body is the same for all—King and peasant, man, woman, and child. As seen in pictures and photographs, it resembles a pair of baggy knickerbockers. It consists of a long strip of coloured cloth, about the same size and shape as a bath-towel. The method of draping it about the body is not easily explained on paper. This much, however, may be said: there are no pins, tapes, buttons, or fastenings of any kind; but the *panoong*, as it is called, is so cleverly twisted and tied, that it can be worn at all times and under all circumstances without any fear of it ever becoming loose. You may run in it, sleep in it, or swim in it, and you will always be perfectly cool and comfortable. This is the only native garment for men, though in the capital, and in other places where white men are seen, the people have learned to wear white linen jackets. These are buttoned to the throat, and collars and shirts are not required. Shoes and stockings are not known, except where the European has taught their use. The soles of the feet get so hard that, in time, they are like leather itself, and cut or wounded feet are very seldom seen.

The women wear a coloured scarf, called the *pahom*, wound round the upper part of the body. This is the only addition to the costume of the men ever invented by the ladies of Siam. As for hats, there are no such things, except a few big straw-plaited erections that look like baskets turned upside down, and which are worn by the women who sit selling their goods in the markets.

The *panoong* and the *pahom* are of brightly coloured material, and a Siamese crowd is always a picturesque sight. According to one of the many superstitions that prevail in the country, every day of the week is under the rule of some particular planet, and to be fortunate throughout the day one should wear garments and jewels of the same colour as the ruling planet. Many rich people do actually observe this custom, and wear red silk and rubies on Sundays in honour of the sun ; white and moonstones on Monday, the day of the moon ; light red and coral on Tuesday, the day of Mars ; green and emeralds on Wednesday, the day of Jupiter ; stripes and cat's-eyes for Jupiter's Thursday ; silver blue and diamonds on Friday, when Venus rules ; and dark blue and sapphires on Saturday, when the chief planet is Saturn.

CHAPTER XIII

FISHING

One of the chief commandments of the Buddhist religion is, "Thou shalt not kill." This does not refer merely to the lives of human beings, but to all creatures —mosquitoes, fleas, flies, or elephants. The reason for the commandment is that, as we have already explained, when a person dies, his soul is reborn again in another body, and this body may possibly be that of some animal. Hence, if you kill a mosquito, you may possibly be killing your own or some one else's long-

A FISHING BOAT OFF THE
ISLAND PAGODA OF PAKNAM

deceased relative. The rule about not taking life is very generally observed, but is neglected in the case of fish. The Siamese excuses himself for fishing, on the ground that he does not kill the fish. He only pulls them out of the water ; they die a natural death.

In Lower Siam fish forms an important part of the food of the people. In Upper Siam it is looked upon as a great luxury, for the rivers in the north are singularly poor in animal life. The absence of fish in the streams of Upper Siam is probably due to the fact that in the dry season the water is too shallow to allow the fish to live, and that in the wet season the current, swollen by the heavy rains, is extremely rapid, and drives them down-stream.

Of the many methods employed for catching fish, the favourite one is by means of enormous traps. These traps are made by fixing a number of bamboos upright in shallow water. A long V-shaped neck is formed, which is sometimes nearly a quarter of a mile long, and which leads by a narrow opening into a square space measuring about sixty feet each way. The fish swim along the V-shaped passage, and, having once entered the square trap, few of them ever find the way out again. They are removed from the trap every two or three days by means of nets.

Many of the canals are bordered for miles with a weed which has a large flat leaf. In places the mass of weeds is so thick that only a small passage of water remains in the centre for the use of the boats. Under the weeds fish are harboured. Bamboo stakes are fixed here and there in the mud to keep the weeds

from floating away. Once or twice a year men surround a portion of this mass of floating water-plants with nets that reach to the bottom of the canal. Thus the fish within the enclosed area cannot escape. The stalks of the weeds are cut close down, and then the whole net is drawn ashore, enclosing vast quantities of fish. Netting fish in this way is not permitted in those places where the canal banks pass in front of a temple, for opposite the grounds of a temple all life is sacred, and the fish that live there are free from interference.

A circular hand-net is also used for catching fish. For permission to catch fish in this way a tax of fourteen pence for each net must be paid. The fisherman stands on the bow of his canoe, and throws the net with an easy swing into the water. It is pulled up by a string fastened to the centre. The edges, which are weighted by a small chain, fall together and enclose any fish which happen to have been lying beneath it when it was thrown into the water.

Prawns are plentiful. They are caught in nets of very small mesh. Two boats go out together for a little distance from the shore, and then separate. Between the boats a heavily weighted net is suspended. When the net is stretched as far as possible, the boats move in towards the shore, dragging it with them. In this way thousands of prawns and other small fish are easily taken. The prawns are pounded into a paste with salt, forming a mixture that tastes something like anchovy sauce. A *fermented* mixture of fish and shrimps is manufactured for export to Singapore,

Hong-Kong, and Java, where it is looked upon as a great dainty by the Malays and the Chinese.

Long poles are driven into the sand in those waters where mussels and other shell-fish are abundant. After a while the poles are covered with the shell-fish which have fastened on them. The poles are then pulled up and scraped.

"A canoe with a white board dipping into the water is paddled along near the bank at night, and the startled fish, endeavouring to jump over it, are caught in the air by a net which projects from the far side. We can easily form some idea of the efficiency of this method, for as the launch tows us up-stream, fish are continually jumping away from the bows of the boat, and it will be unlucky if in the course of the day one does not alight on board. Fine fish two or three pounds in weight may thus be secured without trouble. Large numbers of fish are left in the fields as the water goes down, and every pond is the scene of active fishing operations. I have camped upon the bank of a river and imagined that I heard waves breaking on a sandy shore, only to find that the noise was caused by shoals of small fish jumping" (Thompson).

One of the commonest fish is *plah-tu*, about the size of a herring. When fresh, it tastes like trout ; when smoked, it resembles kippered herring. *Plah-tu* is caught in the Gulf of Siam during the north-east monsoon. The fishing-boats return in the early morning and transfer their cargo to buffalo-carts, that carry it to the village. There the fish are cleaned. The gills are removed, and these, together with all the other refuse,

are thrown into strong brine. The mixture of fishy odds and ends is afterwards sold as "fish-sauce."

There are mud-fish, that come up out of the water and crawl about in the slime, and there is a fish that hides under the banks and shoots drops of water at the flies that are hovering just above. This fish is an excellent marksman, and brings down many a dainty morsel for his meal.

CHAPTER XIV

RICE

Rice is the most important crop grown in Siam. It is almost the sole food of everyone, from the King to the poorest peasant. Horses, cattle, dogs, and cats are fed on it; beer and spirits are made from it; it is eaten boiled, fried, stewed, and baked, in curries, cakes and sauces; it is used at all festivals in connection with certain superstitions; and both the opening and the closing of the season of cultivation are marked by special holidays. A rich man invests his money in rice-fields; the law courts spend most of their time settling quarrels about the ownership of rice-land; and when a man has nothing else to talk about, he talks about the next rice crop, just as in England we talk about the weather. Most of the boats passing up and down the river carry rice; most of the big steamers that leave the port are taking this valuable and important food product to other lands.

Rice

The whole of the land in the country is supposed to belong to the King, but anybody who wishes to plant rice may go into the jungle and clear a space of ground by burning down the long grass and the trees. For this land the farmer pays no rent, and after a time he can claim it as his own. He pays to the Government, however, a tax upon the land which he cultivates. The farms are small, averaging about eight acres : such a farm will comfortably support a family of four or five.

When the ground has been cleared, the farmers wait for the rain, which falls in torrents, and in due course makes the ground soft enough to permit of ploughing. The plough is made of wood, and consists of a bent stick stuck in a pointed wooden block. The plough cuts a shallow furrow about two inches deep and five or six inches wide. It is drawn by buffaloes, formidable-looking beasts with immense spreading horns, which sometimes measure as much as eight or nine feet from tip to tip, measured round the curve.

When the field has been ploughed, it is harrowed with a square harrow made of bamboo and provided with a number of straight wooden teeth. The result of ploughing and harrowing the wet ground is to churn it up into a kind of porridgy mess of slimy grey mud.

Rice can only be grown where there is abundance of moisture. In Siam the peasants depend for their water-supply upon the heavy rains, and then upon the rise of the rivers after the rains have ceased. The floods not merely provide water, but when they subside

they leave behind them a deposit of mud so rich and fertile that manuring is not necessary.

There are forty different kinds of rice, of which about six are widely cultivated in Siam. The natives divide all the known varieties into two classes, which they call "field rice" and "garden rice."

Field rice is grown in places where there is an exceptionally heavy rainfall. The seed is scattered broadcast on the fields, and left to grow without much more attention. As the water rises, the rice grows at the same pace, and so always keeps its head above the surface. The rate of growth of one variety is almost unbelievable. Plants have been known to grow as much as a foot in twelve hours, and the final length of the stalk is often as much as ten feet.

Garden rice is carefully sown and tended. The seeds are first sown as thickly as they can grow, in well-watered patches. They soon sprout, and grow rapidly. When they are a few inches high they are pulled up and made into bundles of a hundred or so, neatly tied together. The mud is removed from the roots by a skilful kick which is given to the bundle as it is drawn from the soil. The bundles are taken to the fields by men, women, and children, and transplanted in long rows. The fields have been covered with water and trampled into a thick mud by the hoofs of the buffaloes. The young shoots are handed to the women and girls, and they push the roots down into the soft mud, working very cleverly and rapidly. A good worker can plant an acre in this way in about three days.

The method of reaping the rice depends on the state of the fields. If the floods have gone, the rice is reaped with the sickle and bound into sheaves. The sheaves are dried in the sun and then taken away in buffalo-carts or in bullock-wagons. But if the fields are still under water, the people row out in boats and canoes, cut off the ripe heads with a sickle, and drop them into small baskets placed in the bottom of the boat. The reapers are very careless, and drop much of the ripe grain into the water. The rice is dried in bundles, placed on frames that have been erected in the fields. The birds are kept away by boys, who are armed with long whips. On the end of the lash they stick a pellet of mud. When they crack the whip the mud flies off, and so clever are they at this form of slinging that they rarely miss the bird at which they aim. When the water has all gone from the fields, the long stalks that have been left standing are burned.

The threshing is done by buffaloes on a floor which is specially prepared by covering it with a paste made of soil, cow-dung, and water. After a few days the plaster sets into a hard, firm covering to the ground. A pole is fixed in the centre, and two buffaloes, yoked side by side, are made to walk round and round the pole, all the while treading the grain under their feet. The threshing takes place on moonlight nights, and is the occasion of much merriment. The children never dream of going to bed. They play in the heaps of straw, or dance round the big bonfires to the sound of fiddles, tom-toms, and drums. Their parents chat and joke the long night through, and in the shadows the

red ends of their cigarettes gleam unceasingly, while the pale green fire-flies flit to and fro, and seem to wonder what it is all about. When the threshing is over, the farmer gives a feast to his neighbours to celebrate the event. His heaps of grain are spread evenly over the threshing floor, the straw is piled up in little stacks, and around all is twined the usual white thread to keep away the evil spirits.

To winnow the rice, it is thrown into the air by means of a wooden spade, or poured from one wide, shallow basket to another. The wind blows through the mixture of grain and chaff and carries the chaff away. The grain is stored in large baskets made of cane and plastered outside with mud. The rice is usually milled at home. The grain is placed in a big hollow in a block of wood. There is a long lever, bearing at one end a heavy wooden hammer. A girl jumps on the other end of the lever and so lifts the hammer. She hops off again, and the hammer falls upon the rice in the hollow block and smashes it up. For hours the women and girls jump patiently on and off the long handle, and in any small village you can hear the steady thump, thump, thump of the hammers from morning to night.

THE ANNUAL RICE PLOUGHING FESTIVAL. *Page 65.*

CHAPTER XV

A PLOUGHING CEREMONY

We have already described the way in which rice is cultivated in a land where the success of the rice-crops means life to thousands of people. It is not surprising to find, under these circumstances, that before the planting of the rice takes place there is held each year a ceremony of great importance. This is a "ploughing festival," and until the holiday has been celebrated no one is supposed to begin the cultivation of his rice-fields.

About March or April the rains arrive, and the farmer turns his thoughts to the work that lies before him. An astrologer is consulted as to a lucky day for the ploughing festival, and when this has been fixed every one waits anxiously to see what will happen, for on this day much will be learned about the prospects of the coming season.

A certain Prince presides over the festival, and for the time being represents the King. He wears a crown, has a royal umbrella, and even receives a portion of the taxes. At one time his personal servants and followers were allowed to take goods without paying for them from the shops along the route which is followed by the procession.

Early in the morning the Prince rises and puts on a special suit of clothes of the richest material. Over his robes he wears a long cloak of white net, which is heavily embroidered with figures of fruit and flowers,

worked in gold and silver. Before he leaves his house he entertains his friends, so that they may get a good look at him in all his holiday finery. When he is quite ready he sits in a gilded chair, and is carried on the shoulders of eight stalwart men. He is accompanied by a crowd of noblemen, some of whom carry curious things that are considered necessary for the success of the fête. Amongst these are a royal umbrella, a large fan such as the priests carry, a sword decorated with white flowers, and a small gold cow with a wreath of sweet-smelling blossoms round its neck.

In front of the state chair there are men in scarlet coats and knickerbockers, beating the usual drums in the usual way. Soldiers in old-fashioned uniforms, priests in yellow robes, nobles in cloth of gold, and men and women of all classes dressed in the brightest colours, pass slowly along in front of the bearers. Behind the chair are more priests who blow weird sounds from horns and conch-shells, and last of all a long string of sight-seers, all of whom are interested in what is going to happen.

With much merry noise, the procession wends its way to a piece of ground outside the city walls. Here a few simple preparations have been made. There is a roofed-in platform made of bamboo, attap-leaf, and boards, and some rather soiled drapery of red and white cloth. In front of the open booth are three bamboo-stakes, firmly fixed in the ground, and marking out the space which the Prince has to plough. In a shed not far away are the cream-coloured bullocks that are to draw the plough. A cord of sacred cotton encircles

the booth, the shed, and the selected ground, and, as usual, keeps out all the evil spirits, who are simply aching to get inside the thread, play tricks, and upset the proceedings.

Within the guarded area is the wooden plough, similar to that described in the last chapter, but gaily decorated with ribbons and flowers. Moreover, the ends of the yoke and the end of the beam are both beautifully carved, and where the yoke is fastened to the beam there is a little gilded idol.

When the Prince arrives on the ground he is shown three pieces of cloth. They are folded up neatly, and look exactly alike, but they differ in length. The Prince looks earnestly at the three little parcels, and chooses one. If he chooses the longest piece of cloth, then there will be little rain that year, and men will be able to let the *panoong* drop to the ankle. If he chooses the shortest, a wet season will follow, and the men who work in the wet rice-fields will have to pull the *panoong* high above the knee. Having chosen the cloth, he fastens it round his body, and is ready to begin ploughing. He holds the handle of the plough and a long rod at the same time, and he has to guide the plough nine times round the space marked out by the three bamboos. A nobleman walks in front of the bullocks, sprinkling consecrated water on the ground. After the third journey a number of old women take part in the performance. They are the very oldest women that can be found, but they are richly dressed, and when their work for the day is done, they are allowed to keep their dresses as payment for their

services. They carry a gilded rod over the shoulder. From the ends of this rod are suspended two baskets, one gilded and the other silvered. The baskets are filled with consecrated grain. Three times more the plough is guided along the proper path, the women following the Prince, and scattering the precious seed to right and left. Everybody tries to get a few grains to mix with the ordinary seed that is to be used in sowing the fields ; for if the consecrated seed be mixed with seed of the ordinary kind, then will the harvest be much richer.

Finally, the Prince makes three more journeys, after which he leaves the ground. The sacred cord is broken, and the people rush about all over the place, picking up any of the grains that they can find, and carefully treasuring them for the good luck they will bring.

But the ceremony is not yet over. There still remains one very important deed to be done. The oxen are unyoked and led back to their shed, and in front of them are placed small baskets made of banana-leaves, and filled with different kinds of seed. One basket contains rice, another grass-seed, another maize, and so on. If the bullocks eat up the maize and leave the rice, then the rice-crops that year will be poor, and the maize-crops will be good. Thus it happens that on this day the farmer finds out what kind of weather he is going to have, and what kind of grain will yield the richest crop.

The Prince is carried back to his home again, with drums beating, horns blowing, and with the same

attendant crowd of soldiers, priests, nobles, and peasants. Once upon a time the people really believed in the ceremony, and what it was supposed to tell them. Even now many thousands of them have great faith in the acts that have been performed ; but as education spreads, the belief in these quaint and picturesque ceremonies will die out. It will, however, be long before they are entirely given up, for they provide opportunities for a merry holiday ; and if there is one thing a Siamese loves more than another, it is a day of feasting and merriment, a day when work is thought of as something belonging only to the morrow.

CHAPTER XVI

ELEPHANTS

The chief animal of Siam is the elephant. Elephants are found in great numbers in the north, and also in the wide plains of the south, where these plains are not cultivated, but are covered with jungle-grass, brush-wood, and bamboo. The Siamese elephant sometimes attains a height of ten or eleven feet. Frequent measurements have proved the curious fact that the height of an elephant is usually about twice the circumference of its biggest foot.

The driver of the elephant is called a *mahout*. When the *mahout* wishes to mount the beast, the elephant bends his right fore-leg to form a step. As soon as the *mahout* puts his foot on the step, the elephant gives a jerk, and

up goes the man on to his back. The driver sits astride on the neck, for the elephant carries his head so steadily that there is less motion there than in any other part of the body. The driver is armed with a stick, at the end of which is a sharp-pointed iron hook. When the elephant misbehaves himself he gets many a cruel blow with the vicious weapon.

The elephants are mostly used for work in the teak-forests. The males, or tuskers, when well trained, are worth from £100 to £200 each. The females are not usually employed in this work, and no elephants at all are worked in hot weather between ten in the morning and three in the afternoon. An elephant begins to work when it is about twenty-five years of age, and is at its best at about seventy. At that age it can lift with its tusks a log of wood weighing half a ton, and drag along the ground a log weighing as much as three tons. Elephants are very long-lived, sometimes living 150 years or more.

In the forest the trees are felled by men who use heavy, long-handled axes. This work is done in the wet season, so that the trees fall in soft ground and do not get seriously damaged. The logs are arranged in parallel rows by the elephants, and then each elephant is harnessed to a log, which he proceeds to drag towards the stream. Young stems are placed under the big logs to serve as rollers. The distance from the forest to the river is often as much as ten miles, and is rarely less than five miles. The elephants move very slowly—at a pace averaging less than three miles an hour—and the process of taking the logs to the river is therefore slow and

tedious. When the elephant reaches the river-bank he stacks the logs for the inspection of the men who come to buy. They are marked in such a way that each merchant can, later on, easily recognize his own property ; then the elephants take them one by one, and put them in the creek or river. They push them over boulders and sandbanks, remove fallen trees out of the way, and, finally, bring them where there is a good current, and they can be bound into rafts and floated south.

When the logs arrive at the saw-mills other elephants land them, and so well do they understand their work that they rarely need the direction of the *mahout;* they are so intelligent that when they hear the dinner-bell sound for the workmen, they instantly drop their logs and scamper off, screaming with joy, just like a lot of children let out of school.

They are up to all kinds of tricks. For instance, at night they are turned loose to feed. A heavy, trailing chain is attached to them, and as they move about, the chain drags on the ground and leaves a trail, by means of which they are traced in the morning. But an elephant which has made up its mind to run away has been known "to carefully gather up the tell-tale chain and carry it for miles on its tusks." Again, each elephant has a bell, and the driver recognizes the whereabouts of his own elephant, even when afar off, by the sound of this bell. But some elephants will remove the bell with their trunk, and then run away and hide themselves. They frequently jerk a *mahout* whom they do not like on to the ground and trample on him.

They can be used to make their lazy brothers work. In such cases a good big tusker is employed. He digs his tusks into the side of the idle one, and forces him to take up his log. Sometimes the beasts fight amongst themselves, and then they seem to aim chiefly at biting off one another's tails.

They have to be humoured at their work or they turn sulky. They work three days and rest three days. If they get ill, pills made of fiery chillies are rubbed into the eyes. This is probably the only animal that takes pills with its eyes. The animals get at least one bath a day. They will not drag one log for a long distance; but having brought it, say, for three-quarters of a mile, they go back and fetch another. When they have collected a little pile all in the same place, they set off again, carrying each of the logs about another three-quarters of a mile, and returning for the rest. They never cross a bridge without first testing it with one foot to see if they think that it is safe. They are afraid of ponies, and by Siamese law, a pony meeting an elephant has to get out of the way.

Once or twice a year there is a big elephant-hunt at Ayuthia, the old capital. At the beginning of the wet season orders are sent forth that elephants are to be collected. A number of men traverse the plain where the elephants have been allowed to roam unmolested, and drive them in towards the town.

People of all classes go to Ayuthia to see the fun—Princes and peasants, Europeans and Asiatics, laymen and priests. There is a great deal of excitement, particularly when the elephants are expected. Presently

AN ELEPHANT HUNT AT AYUTHIA. *Page 72.*

an enormous tusker is seen. This is a tame elephant. He walks slowly in front, and the crowd of wild elephants behind who have taken him for their leader follow like a flock of sheep, except that they make more noise. Round the outside of the herd there are other tame elephants, carrying men on their backs who are armed with spears. At last they reach the river. They stop for a moment, but the big tusker marches on in front, and the others are pushing at the back, so into the water they all go. They swim to the other side of the river, and there the mounted elephants get the whole herd into line again, pretending all the while to be their friends. Then the tusker marches into a big enclosure set round with posts, and thence through a gateway into a second enclosure. By this time some of the wild elephants have an idea that they are being trapped, and they try to go back; but the guard-elephants stand quite steady, and the men on their backs make good use of their spears. So at last the captives are brought into a square space surrounded by a high, thick wall, on which hundreds of spectators are crowded, watching the operations. This ends the first day.

The next morning half a dozen tuskers are led into the enclosure, or *paneat*, as it is called. On the back of each elephant are two men, provided with long coils of rope. They look for those young elephants that they think can be trained to make strong and useful servants later on. Having chosen one, they chase him about, and, after a time, succeed in getting a noose under his foot, and in pulling the noose tightly up above the knee. The other end of the coil is thrown to the men upon the

ground, and they make it fast to a post. When the youngster tries to run about again, he finds that he is held tightly by one leg. He shows his displeasure by the most heart-rending howls. As soon as a certain number have been tied up to posts, a gate is opened in the enclosure, and the uncaptured beasts are allowed to rush out on to the plain beyond. But they are not permitted to go back to their homes in the jungle ; a ring of mounted elephants surrounds the plain and keeps them within bounds.

The young ones in the *paneat* are led out, one at a time, through a narrow gate. A tame elephant leads the way, and another follows. Once outside, three mounted elephants appear. One goes on each side of the captive, and the third follows behind. The captive is fastened by his neck to the necks of his brethren on either side, and in this humiliating way he is led to the stables. There he is tied by the neck and one leg to a post. After about three years he has lost his temper, become gentle, and can then be taught to work.

Other elephants are noosed in the open, but in the evening, after a bathe in the river, the herd goes back to the *paneat*. When as many elephants have been chosen as are wanted, the rest are set free, and allowed to wander at liberty for another twelve months.

CHAPTER XVII

WHITE ELEPHANTS

SIAM has been called the "Land of the White Elephant,' and no account of the country would be complete which failed to take notice of these peculiar animals. The national flag is a white elephant on a scarlet ground; the mercantile flag is a white elephant on a blue ground; and on every temple and official building this wonderful creature is fashioned in stone, wood, and plaster.

In former days the King did not feel himself fully a king unless he possessed a white elephant, and he never hesitated about undertaking a war in order to obtain one of these rare animals. There is a story that Gautama was once a white elephant, and that his mother, in a dream, met him in heaven in that shape. Another legend says that now and again in the world's history a monarch appears who conquers and rules every nation under the sun. This monarch is known by certain signs, and by the possession of certain objects. Of seven particular things that he owns, a white elephant is one, and without a white elephant he could not become king of the world. Then many of the Siamese believe that the animal is inhabited by the soul of some great man of the past, or by that of someone yet unborn, who will in due time be a person of great distinction.

In former years no subject was allowed to keep a white elephant. If by chance he found one, he hastened to present it to the King. If he dared to try to keep it

for himself, the King made war upon him and took it away by force.

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a white elephant. The animal is not really white, but only a little lighter in colour than the ordinary elephant. Occasionally it is of the colour of dirty bath brick, and it may have a few white hairs on its tail or its head.

The news of the discovery of a white elephant always produced great joy in the people and the King. The King sent a body of nobles and princes to the place where the animal had been found, and where he was tethered by silken cords. The ambassadors guarded the quadruped while professional elephant-tamers taught it how to behave in the presence of men and in the streets of a town. People went from all parts of the country to visit it and take it presents.

Meanwhile, in the capital, a palace was rapidly erected for the sublime animal. When the palace was finished and the taming of the elephant completed, a stately procession set out to meet it and bring it home. The King headed the procession, and when he met the elephant he knelt before it and gave it presents, after which he turned round and led the way back to the capital. In the elephant's new residence there was a wardrobe for his clothes, and covers of velvet and silk embroidered with gold and jewels. On his head was fastened a gold plate bearing his name and titles. He had a troupe of slaves and a party of priests, an orchestra of musicians, and a number of dancing-girls, all specially set apart for his instruction and amusement. When the elephant wanted to sleep, the priests chanted slumber-songs;

when he looked lively and wakeful, the dancing-girls sang and danced to him. When he was hungry, he was fed with the finest fruits and vegetables. As a rule this life of laziness and luxury soon brought about his death.

Only about thirty years ago, a party of hunters who were looking for white elephants saw in the distance an elephant of excellent shape and size, but of no particular colour. On examining it a little closer, they fancied that it might be one of that rare kind for which they were seeking. They took him away and washed the mud off him, and then, to their intense joy, they found that not only was he light in colour, but that on his back there were a few hairs that were positively white. The country went wild with joy. Bangkok was decorated with flags, and illuminated at night. All the place was gay with banners, lights, and music. The King went to meet the animal, and the priests read a long and flattering address to it.

The priests then baptized the animal and gave him his new name and titles, which were very numerous, and which were written on a piece of sugar-cane ; this the elephant promptly swallowed. It was probably the only part of the ceremony that gave him any pleasure. He was taken to his new apartment, and there fed by kneeling servants, who offered him food on dishes made of silver.

Things are much changed now. When the last white elephant was discovered, he was sent to Bangkok on a railway-truck. There was no guard of honour, no procession, and the King only went to visit him when he was lodged in the stables. On the way to the palace the

new-comer behaved himself very badly by walking up to a fruit-seller's stall—the first it had ever seen—and eating up everything that was on it, almost before the attendants had had time to notice what he was doing. Nowadays, the white elephants are badly fed by miserable grooms. They no longer have either priests or dancing-girls. The walls of their stables are half in ruins, and the roofs are covered with dirt of great age and thickness. Their food is only hay, leaves, and young bamboos. By the side of each elephant is a cage ; this is intended for a white monkey, the fit and proper companion for the white elephant. But as white monkeys are more rare than white elephants, all these cages are empty.

Once a year each elephant is sprinkled with holy water by the priests, and is made to listen to a number of long prayers. This is done to keep away evil spirits, and so successful is the operation that it only needs repeating once in twelve months. When one of the elephants dies, they bring a white monkey, a few doctors, and a few priests, to visit the deceased. By his side they dig a hole in the ground, in which incense is burned. The body is covered with a white cloth, and then taken out of the town and left to rot in a field. Later on the bones and tusks are collected and preserved. For three days after the death of the quadruped a number of priests remain praying in the stable, requesting the spirit of the animal not to come back again and do any damage.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRIAL BY ORDEAL

It is a long time since anyone in England had to undergo "trial by ordeal," but amongst the Early English it was no uncommon thing for a man to try and prove his innocence when charged with crime by plunging his hand into boiling water or by holding a red-hot piece of iron. This was done in the church and before the priest. After a certain number of days the wound was examined. If it had healed, the accused was innocent; if it had not healed, he was guilty.

Trial by ordeal in Siamese law-courts lasted down to quite recent times, and even now ordeals are practised privately for various purposes.

In one of the fire ordeals the accuser and the accused had to walk with bare feet over a layer of live coals ten inches thick. The fire was made in a ditch, ten feet long by twenty inches wide and twenty inches deep. As the competitors walked over the red-hot coals, an official pressed heavily on their shoulders to make them go slowly. At the end of the trial the feet of the men were examined, and he who had no blisters, either then or during the next fifteen days, won the case. If both were unhurt, they had to undergo another ordeal by water; if both were burnt, they were both fined. Only about forty years ago a trial of this kind occurred at a law-court in one of the smaller towns of the interior.

In the ordeal by diving, use was made of a pond or of the river itself. Two stakes were fixed about ten feet away from each other. The parties first said their prayers, and then entered the water with safety-ropes fastened round their waists. They walked into the water until it reached to their necks. Each laid hold of his stake, and then a long pole was placed so that it was supported by the shoulders of both competitors. A signal was given on a gong, and an official leant heavily on the pole and pushed the heads of the parties under the water. He who remained under the water the longer of the two was the winner. If both remained under water longer than a fixed time, they were hauled up by the safety-ropes and the case was dismissed. If the people who had quarrelled were rich, they could employ people to dive for them, instead of getting wet and breathless themselves; and there is a story told of a man who once engaged a pearl-diver to represent him, and so won easily. A trial of this kind occurred at the northern town of Chiengmai as late as January, 1882.

Phya Tak, the man whom we spoke about in the first chapter of this book, once defeated the army of a rebel who was also a priest. When the rebel was captured, a large number of yellow-robed brethren were taken with him. The King called them all together, and as he could not tell the innocent from the guilty, he said to them: "Those of you who confess your guilt must leave the priesthood, but I will give you other clothes, and set you free without punishment. Those who say they are innocent must prove their innocence

A RELIGIOUS WATER PROCESSION.

by the diving-test. If you fail in this test, you will be executed."

Many priests confessed at once that they had been helping the rebel host. They were released as the King had promised. But many others swore that they were innocent. The King sat on a chair on the river-bank and watched the priests go down into the water one by one. Some of them stayed under the water the proper length of time, and so proved themselves not guilty; but others who failed were stripped of their robes and executed on the spot. Their bodies were burnt; their ashes were mixed with lime, and used to whitewash a part of a temple structure.

Sometimes melted lead was used in trial by ordeal. The contending parties thrust their hands into molten lead, and he who was not burnt won the case. Molten tin or boiling oil were used occasionally instead of the molten lead.

A regular method of settling disputes about money that had been lent was the trial by swimming. The parties had to swim either across a stream or against the current for a certain distance. The loser had to pay double the sum in dispute. Half the amount paid was given to the winner, while the other half was handed over to the Government as a fine.

Trial by means of candles was more comfortable than trial by fire and water. Two candles of exactly the same kind of wax, of the same weight, and with wicks containing the same number of threads, were lit and placed on suitable stands. The man whose candle burnt away first was the loser. It is related of a certain

nobleman that he was once asked to seize the throne and get rid of a usurper who was reigning at the time. He took two candles, one for himself and one for the usurper, and watched them burn. His own candle won. Taking this to mean that he would be successful, he raised an army, attacked the sovereign, defeated him, and reigned in his stead.

Then there were trials connected with eating and drinking. One of these consisted in drinking water in which a sacred image had been bathed. If any misfortune happened to the person within a fortnight after the day he took the water he was declared guilty. In other cases rice was eaten; this was given by the priest, and was mixed with drugs and other nasty things. If the accused person was made sick by the dose, that proved him to be guilty. This form of trial was practised until quite recently for the detection of various small offences. A similar form of ordeal existed in England as late as the middle of the thirteenth century. A morsel of bread and cheese had to be eaten. It did no harm if the person were innocent, but gave him convulsions if he were guilty.

Tree-climbing was also indulged in for the discovery of culprits. For this purpose a particular kind of tree was stripped of its bark, leaving a very slippery stem underneath. A man could prove his innocence of the charge brought against him by successfully "climbing the greasy pole."

Before any of the diving-trials that we have mentioned take place, the recorder reads out a long address to the "gods of all mountains, streams, lakes, and creeks," for

which he is paid about five shillings. There is a similar address and a similar fee before any one of any of the trials by fire. In this latter address the deities are asked to take vengeance on the guilty. Amongst other pleasant things that the recorder reads are the following words :

" May the deities cause all the sinful, ferocious beasts who molest man on this earth to arise and appear before the eyes of him who has said what is false, making him shake and shiver with fright ; may his skin blister and his hair bristle on his head ; may the terror of the approaching danger appear on his countenance, and his limbs tremble as he sees the glare of the brisk flames !

" O God of Fire, so gloriously shining and mighty ! scorch and blister him as he enters the flames !

" O God of Fire, radiant and mighty in these accumulated embers, scald, blister, burn him, so that his guilt may appear evident before every eye !"

THE END

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